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Guidance

Diabetic eye screening: programme overview

An overview of the NHS diabetic eye screening (DES) programme, its services and contact information.

From:

Public Health England (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england>)

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Information for the public about diabetic eye screening (DES) screening is available on the NHS website (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/diabetic-eye-screening/>) and in the below videos.

It is an individual's choice whether or not to have screening. People can opt out (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/opting-out-of-the-nhs-population-screening-programmes>) if they do not want to receive screening invitations.

Public Health England (PHE) is committed to reducing inequalities and variation in screening participation (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/nhs-population-screening-access-for-all>) to help make sure everyone has fair and equal access to screening services.

PHE provides information about data use and patient confidentiality in population screening programmes (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/patient-confidentiality-in-nhs-population-screening-programmes>).

Target population

Diabetic eye screening is offered to anyone with diabetes who is 12 years old or over. They are invited for eye screening once a year.

Condition screened for

A range of eye problems can affect people with diabetes. One of these conditions is diabetic retinopathy.

This is a complication of diabetes, which is caused by high blood sugar levels damaging the back of the eye (retina). Diabetic retinopathy can cause blindness if it is left undiagnosed and untreated.

The **NHS** website (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/diabetic-retinopathy/>) has more information, including:

- the stages of diabetic retinopathy
- treatment
- prevention

Diabetic eye screening test

The **DES** test (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/diabetic-eye-screening/what-happens/>) usually lasts about 30 minutes.

There are several parts to the test. They are:

1. Reading letters on a chart.
2. Having eye drops put into each eye.
3. A photo taken of the back of the eyes.

Evidence base

Diabetic eye screening is one of 11 **NHS** national population screening programmes (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-population-screening-explained>) available in England.

The UK National Screening Committee (<https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/uk-national-screening-committee-uk-nsc>) (**UKNSC**) makes recommendations (<https://legacyscreening.phe.org.uk/screening-recommendations.php>) to ministers in the 4 UK countries on all aspects of population screening. It ensures that screening provides more benefit than harm, at a reasonable cost to the **NHS**.

Recommendations are based on internationally recognised criteria (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evidence-review-criteria-national-screening-programmes>) and a rigorous evidence review process (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-nsc-evidence-review-process>).

Read the **UKNSC** recommendation on **DES** (<https://legacyscreening.phe.org.uk/diabeticretinopathy>).

Data and intelligence

PHE collects routine data (<https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/cancerservices/data#page/0>) to monitor the uptake of DES.

Requests for screening data and research

The DES programme has its own research advisory committee (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-population-screening-data-requests-and-research>).

PHE has terms of reference for NHS population screening programme research advisory committees (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-population-screening-data-requests-and-research>).

Commissioning

All DES screening commissioners must follow the DES service specification (<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/public-health-national-service-specifications/>) and use the supporting documents (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/diabetic-eye-screening-commission-and-provide>) to ensure a fit for purpose programme is set up and meets the required standards.

Quality assurance

The role of the screening quality assurance service (SQAS) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-population-screening-quality-assurance>) is to:

- assess the quality of local screening programmes
- monitor compliance with standards
- support services with improving quality
- undertake regional level quality assurance visits (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nhs-population-screening-regional-quality-assurance-teams-in-england>)

The programme specific operating model (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/diabetic-eye-screening-internal-and-external-quality-assurance>) for quality assurance of the DES screening programme should be read in conjunction with the operating model for PHE screening quality assurance service (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/screening-quality-assurance-service-operating-model>) and the relevant programme standards (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/diabetic-eye-screening-programme-standards>).

Workforce – education and training

Education and training resources (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/diabetic-eye-screening-education-and-training>) are available for healthcare professionals working in DES screening.

There are also more general resources (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-population-screening-education-and-training>) about population screening to support screening professionals in their initial training and continuing professional development (CPD).

Keep up to date

Visit the Public Health England (PHE) screening blog (<https://phescreening.blog.gov.uk/category/des/>) to keep up to date with what is new in the programme, including the latest guidance and good practice. You can register to receive blog updates (<https://phescreening.blog.gov.uk/subscribe/>) direct to your inbox. PHE Screening also has its own Twitter account, (https://twitter.com/phe_screening) which provides information and news on all national screening programmes.

Contact the screening team

Contact the PHE Screening helpdesk (<https://phescreening.blog.gov.uk/helpdesk/>) with any queries about this publication, making sure you include its full title.

Population screening helpdesk

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The helpdesk is not for media enquiries and does not have access to screening results. For queries about results, contact your GP or local screening service. Order screening leaflets at www.gov.uk/phe/screening-leaflets (<http://www.gov.uk/phe/screening-leaflets>).

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1. 5 May 2021
Added lifetime screening pathway videos.
2. 8 February 2017
Updated wording relating to staff training.
3. 1 January 2014
First published.

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Related content

- Evidence and recommendations: NHS population screening (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/evidence-and-recommendations-nhs-population-screening>)

- Newborn blood spot screening: programme overview (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/newborn-blood-spot-screening-programme-overview>)
- Abdominal aortic aneurysm screening: programme overview (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/abdominal-aortic-aneurysm-screening-programme-overview>)
- Newborn hearing screening: programme overview (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/newborn-hearing-screening-programme-overview>)
- Diabetic eye screening programme: standards (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/diabetic-eye-screening-programme-standards>)

Brexit

Check what you need to do (<https://www.gov.uk/transition>)

Explore the topic

- NHS diabetic eye screening (DES) programme (<https://www.gov.uk/topic/population-screening-programmes/diabetic-eye>)